



**NORTH DAKOTA**  
DEPARTMENT *of* HEALTH

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **State Health Department Encourages North Dakotans To Compost Yard Waste**

BISMARCK, N.D. – With fall cleanup upon us, the North Dakota Department of Health encourages residents to compost yard waste, support compost programs, and use compost to enrich and fertilize soil, according to Steve Tillotson, manager of the department's Solid Waste Program.

“Yard waste compost is nature’s best fertilizer and soil enhancer,” Tillotson said. “Composting yard waste recycles precious nutrients and organic matter, conserves fossil fuels used to produce fertilizer, and saves landfill space. Plus, composting saves the work of bagging yard waste materials.”

Composting is the breakdown of organic materials by soil bacteria, producing humus or soil organic matter. Compost makes soil richer and better for plants. Potentially, anything that grows in your backyard is food for composting.

Like other living things, the organisms in a compost pile need water, air and a balanced diet – a mixture of green forage high in nitrogen (such as grass) and brown material high in carbon (such as dead leaves, straw and newspaper). A properly operated compost pile does not generate odors and saves the homeowner from the chore of bagging bulky materials like leaves and grass clippings.

Composting yard waste this fall and winter will result in material for your garden, lawn and landscaping needs next summer. Follow these composting tips:

- Place compost in a corner of the yard in a bin or fenced area.
- Collect leaves and grass by mowing or raking. Mowing chops up leaves and mixes in grass clippings, making a good compost medium.

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- Place materials in layers, adding water to each layer. If the material becomes soggy, you've added too much water.
- Turn the material periodically to help add air; add water or more material as needed.
- Don't worry if your compost pile freezes over the winter; it will become active again once it thaws.
- Check the compost pile during the spring thaw; if the compost is excessively wet, turn it and add more dead leaves, straw or newspaper to soak up the moisture.
- Vegetable matter from the kitchen can be composted; however, do not place meat, grease, or dairy products into a compost pile.

Many communities have compost programs for recycling grass and leaf materials. If you do not want to compost in your yard, consider supporting local compost programs. Take your yard waste to a local compost facility or drop-off site to help keep your community green.

Several North Dakota cities have community composting programs, including Bismarck and Dickinson.

"Bismarck has generated more than 3,200 tons of compost to date in 2009," said Galen Bren, recycling specialist for the city of Bismarck. "There are 23 collection sites for residential grass clippings throughout Bismarck. As a thank-you to our residents, the city is offering up to three large garbage containers of free compost, or one-quarter of a pick-up truck bed full, available from the Bismarck landfill."

Last year, the city of Dickinson produced 250 tons of compost and sold 240 tons. The city also sold 95 tons of wood chips. Redirecting such materials from the waste stream produces a valuable fertilizer and saves valuable space in the landfill.

"The Dickinson landfill encourages residents to compost through the city's voluntary composting program," said Ron Bachmeier with the city of Dickinson Public Works department. "Residents can drop off their lawn and garden debris at the Dickinson Bailer Building at no cost. The city saves the residents time and effort by making the compost for them. Dickinson residents may pick up the finished compost from the Bailer Building by truckload for \$15 per ton. Small quantities, such as a 5-gallon bucket, are free. The compost is even loaded for the residents – no shovels are required!"

To find local sources of compost or for a pamphlet about composting, contact your local solid waste program or Christy Smith, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.5166.

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